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Book .58

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*The Essential Duty of Jesus Christ,
considered*

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SERMON

DELIVERED AT

THE EAST MEETING-HOUSE IN BOSCAWEN,

ON

LORD'S DAY,

FEBRUARY 11, 1816.

BY DANIEL STANIFORD, V.D.M.

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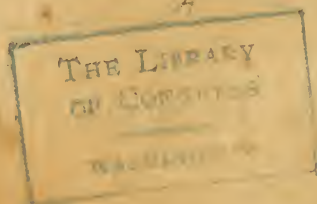
TO THE READER.

The author of the following Discourse requests leave to suggest, that it was written after short notice, and under the pressure of bodily infirmities, without the slenderest wish or expectation that more publicity would attach to it, than would result from the delivery. In a view of its numerous defects, and the vast importance of the subject, he is reminded of the sacred prohibition, "thou shalt not offer the lame in sacrifice." Still, at the request of friends, it appears before you, and solicits that candor, for the exercise of which it furnishes abundant occasion.

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Sermon.

ST. JOHN, XIV. 19.

Because I live, ye shall live also.

My respected Hearers,

CORPOREAL infirmities preclude the propriety of a lengthy discourse at this time, or of *my* attempting to do justice to this copious and very interesting subject. Waving, therefore, all preliminary observations, it is remarked, that the passage now quoted contains these two important sentiments, viz. That Jesus Christ lives—And, That, because he lives, all true believers in him shall live also. With respect to the first position, viz, That Christ lives, some thoughts will be suggested, in regard to the mode in which he exists, and likewise respecting the extent of his life. Now Christ lives independently. Every other being in the universe, except God, exists in a dependent manner. Angels are ministering spirits, dependent on God, and sent by him to minister to those of our race, who shall be heirs of salvation. Heb. i. 14. Ministers of the Gospel are servants of the Most High God, who shew unto us the way of salvation. Acts xvi. 17. Private Christians are entirely dependent for every thing they possess. For we are not sufficient of ourselves, to think any thing as of our-

selves ; but our sufficiency is of God. 2 Epistle to the Corinthians, iii. 5. All rational beings exist, move, and act, dependently. In God we live, move, and have our being. Acts xvii. 28. Irrational beings, likewise, exist in the same mode. God made the great leviathan to play in the great and wide sea. Inanimate matter is, in like manner, dependent. God is styled, in Scripture, the Father of the rain ; he is said to beget the drops of the dew. And he causes the sun to shine ; and he sealeth up the stars with cloudy darkness of the night — But Christ exists independent and underived ; i. e. in his Divine nature. Should it be asked, Whence does this appear ? Answer. It may be demonstrated by philosophy and by Scripture. As it is presumed all present believe the Scriptures, to avoid prolixity, instead of separate deductions from each of the aforementioned sources, recourse will be had promiscuously to both, as occasion may require. Now, he who has an absolute, uncontrolled power to communicate, must, in the very nature of things, be actually possessed of the thing to be communicated. We read of Christ in John vi. 33. He it is that giveth life unto the world ; and Jesus Christ, the faithful and true Witness, has testified, in John xvii. 2. that he has power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as God the Father has given him ; and, in the text, he has promised believers, that, because he lives, they shall live also. Consequently, Christ must possess life ; and further, he must possess it essentially and independently ; else the bestowment of it, which he has promised to all believers in him, cannot be secured to them,

maugre all contingencies : for if Christ possesses this life by communication or derivation only, and not inherently or essentially, the same Being who gave it may, perhaps, withdraw or recall it ; in which event, Christ's power fails, his promise resting thereon is annulled, and the believer's hope is blasted, and he must inevitably sink in the prospect of eternal death. Says the Psalmist, " If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do ? In vain may it be urged, in reply, that God the Father, who gives the power to Christ, is a Being of infinite veracity, and cannot deny himself : he will therefore never, yea, he *can* never, recall it. It is replied, that his communicating the power, together with his other attributes, or the fulness of the Godhead, to another distinct, intelligent being, necessarily destroys his immutability ; and let it be asked, on what different foundation rests his veracity ? Why must not all his attributes stand or fall together ?

If any one thinks proper to adduce, in opposition, that passage, John v. 26. For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself, it is replied, that the present observations exclusively refer to Christ's Divine nature ; whereas the passage in view has sole reference to his human, as is evident, if we attend to verse 27., where it is added, " and hath given him authority to execute judgment also : " because he is the Son of Man. It is conceived that the sentiment contained in verse 26. is precisely this : That the first Person in the Holy Trinity, designated by the appellation of Father, did consent that the second Person, or the Son,

should, in a mysterious manner, unite himself to the human soul of the Son of Mary ; in consequence whereof, the complex character of God-Man, thus formed, should possess an independent principle of life.

The passage before us being thus explained, it is believed every mind may fairly be relieved from every difficulty ; as the common sense of all revolts from the idea of giving or receiving an independent property ; which is as great a solecism as the assertion, that the second is the first, or that two is one, in arithmetic.

Christ's independence may also be demonstrated by his eternity. In John's 1 Epistle, v. 20. Christ is said to be eternal ; i. e. he is styled eternal life. Now if the phrase, as it stands, be insisted on, and the principal weight of the expression be laid on the noun instead of laying it on the adjective and noun conjointly, still candor must allow, that Christ *possesses* eternal life ; and will any choose to assert, that a being possessing an eternal attribute is not himself necessarily eternal ? Now eternity past implies retrocession, and retrocession involves in it priority. Well, Christ says, Rev. i. 11. I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. Now those versed in the Greek language know very well, that there is no letter in its alphabet before Alpha ; and the school-boy can tell you, there is nothing prior to the first. Christ then must be eternal ; and as there was no being in the universe on whom he depended, or from whom he derived his existence, he must consequently be self-existent, underived, and independent.

Again, Christ's independent existence may be demonstrated by his infinite fulness, or his possessing all the attributes of Deity, in the highest possible degree of perfection. In Col. i. 19. it is said, It pleased the Father that in him all fulness should dwell. Now if he possessed this fulness by communication from God the Father, or derived it from him, what conception shall we form of God, subsequent to this communication of all his attributes to the Son? Is the Father thereby exhausted, and stripped of all his glory? He must be, if all is communicated to another distinct intelligence: but, if reason and the language of mankind *would* permit us to assert, that in Jesus dwells all the fulness of the Godhead, and still, that a part of the Father's fulness was retained, does not the imparting of one, the least iota, militate with the truth that the Father is immutable? In whatever light we view the subject, the hypothesis, that Christ exists dependently, by communicated life or derived existence, involves the greatest absurdities, exposes to numerous insurmountable difficulties, and, as it respects God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, let it be seriously asked, how far it falls short of blasphemy? Christ, then, must possess his infinite divine fulness essentially, inherently, independently; he must then exist independently: because, were he dependent for his existence, he must be dependent for every subsequent acquisition. Furthermore, it would be preposterous, to predicate independent properties or attributes of a dependent being.

Again, Christ must be independent, as to his existence, because he has all the properties of Deity; or, in other words, is truly God. For

proof of this, see Exodus xxiii, 20. God says, Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee in the way ; beware of him, and obey his voice ; provoke him not : for he will not pardon your transgressions : for *my name* is in him. Well, in Exodus xxxiv. we are informed, by God himself, what his name or character is, viz: The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin ; and that will, by no means, clear the guilty, &c. Now it is generally admitted, that this angel is Christ, and this *name* of God being in him, and he being possessed of all the attributes that God is possessed of, if he does not possess them independently, neither does God possess them independently ; and if God does not possess them independently, to whom is God indebted for them ? from whom did *he* derive them, or on whom was God dependent ? But does not common sense and the feelings of all mankind revolt from the suggestion of a *dependent* God ? The Scriptures abundantly testify, that Christ is truly God. Job xix. 25. says, For I know that my Redeemer liveth ; and that he shall stand, at the latter day, upon the earth ; and though, after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet, in my flesh, shall I see God.—Now I think no one will deny, that Job's Redeemer is Christ, nor that by Redeemer, and God, in this passage, is intended the same person. In Psalm xlv. 6. we read, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever—this the Apostle, Heb. i. 8. declares, was spoken by God to Christ.—Isaiah xl. 3. says, The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way

of the Lord, make straight, in the desert, a highway for our God. This text, St. Luke iii. 4. applies to John Baptist; whom all acknowledge to be Christ's precursor; hence it appears, that Isaiah, and John Baptist, and St. Luke, all unite in styling Christ God; as does the angel, who appeared to Zacharias and predicted the birth of John; see Luke i. 16. God says, by Isaiah, I am the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior; and I am the Lord; and beside me there is no Savior; but Christ is, in numerous instances, styled the Savior of mankind; must he not then be God? Must not the Holy One of Israel and Christ be the same? In Jeremiah xxiii. 5. 6. we read, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch; and a King shall reign and prosper; and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days, Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely. And this is his name, whereby he shall be called, The Lord, or Jehovah, or God, our Righteousness. Will any deny that this refers to Christ? Read Isaiah ix. 6. For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, &c. Who is this but Christ? See Matthew i. 23. Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son; and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which, being interpreted, is, God with us. Here the inspired Matthew expressly applies the aforementioned words of Isaiah to Christ. Does not Thomas, in a transport of faith, say unto Christ, My Lord, and my God?

John xx. 28.—Has not Paul, in Titus ii. 13. these words, “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ?” I trust that no one will suggest, that, in this passage, the appearance of more than one Person is intimated; as the appearance of God the Father, on earth, is rarely, if ever, mentioned in Scripture. Paul, in his 1 Epistle to Timothy, vi. 16. styles Christ the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality. The last cited passage, it is believed, establishes the essential Divinity of Christ, beyond all controversy. If we argue, as we fairly may, that if Christ only hath immortality, and is an intelligent Being, distinct from the Father, then God the Father is mortal. Is it not a fair conclusion? Yet who would choose to adopt it?

In Acts xx. 28. Paul, in his valedictory address to the elders of the church at Ephesus, commands them to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. Now no one can reasonably deny, that by God, in this passage, the apostle meant Christ; for God the Father did not shed his blood for sinners. Add to this, what is said of Christ in 1 Timothy iii. 16. God was manifest in the flesh. By God here must be intended Christ; because it is added, that he was preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory; whereas God, in the Person of the Father, is not spoken of in Scripture, as the main subject of preaching, or the object of faith; nor was he ever received up into glory. And in Romans ix. 5. Of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ

came, who is over all, God, blessed forever. Amen.

Thus it may appear, from the general tenor of Scripture, that Christ is called God ; the same attributes that are predicated of the Father, are ascribed to the Son : they are, in Scripture, called by the same names, and addressed by the same titles ; and Christ, when on earth, accepted the same worship, adoration, and praise, that is commanded to be presented to God, and to him alone. And our Savior himself, as also his inspired servants, apply to him, in the writings of the New-Testament, many things that were spoken of God in the Old. Those who are favored with Divine Revelation, and admit the Divinity of the Bible, all view what is therein predicated of God as going to establish a character infinite, incomprehensible, eternal, independent, self-existent, omnipotent, omniscient, amiable and good to an unbounded degree. And all mankind, even the heathen, conceive of God in the same manner. And these attributes are what constitute the character of Christ ; why then is he not God ? And if God, why does he not exist independently ?

It was likewise proposed to suggest some things in regard to the extent of the life of Christ. And that he exists from eternity to eternity, the Scripture fully reveals. That his existence was coeval with God the Father's, is plainly intimated in Proverbs viii. from 22. to 30. where the wise man, speaking of him under the appellation of Wisdom, introduces her as speaking thus : " The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth

was ; when there were no depths, I was brought forth ; when there were no fountains abounding with water," &c. adding then, " I was by him, as one brought up with him." And that Christ is equal to the Father, in all things that relate to his Divine nature or essence, appears from Zechariah xiii. 7. Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd ; and against the Man that is my Fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts. This man must be Christ ; as no mere man can be styled Fellow with the Lord of Hosts ; and Christ is the Shepherd that was smitten, agreeably to the command. Well, eternity of past existence is, by all, acknowledged as an essential property of the Lord of Hosts ; then Christ, being his Equal, or Fellow, must be eternal, as to his past existence. And respecting Christ's eternal future existence, Paul to the Hebrews, vii. 24. says, Wherefore, he is able, also, to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him ; seeing he ever liveth, &c.

Once more, read Christ's own words, who is the faithful and true Witness. Rev. i. 18. Behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And has not Christ been viewed as an independent and eternal Being, by saints in all ages ?—But to come nearer home, permit the inquiry, my Christian friends, when you were convinced of your native sinful and wretched state, were detached from your self-righteous hopes, and saw nothing before you but guilt and despair ; when, in the hour of mercy, God revealed his Son in you, as the hope of glory, did you view Christ as a dependent, derived being, acting merely by delegation or *officially* ; or was he revealed to you

as an independent, self-existent, and almighty Savior? Was it mere *official* grace in Christ, that was displayed to your view, that induced you to submit, that drew you to him, as with the cords of love and the bands of a man, or was it the essential grace of his very nature that you trusted in—that essentially Divine compassion of his, of which the apostle speaks, in 2 Cor. viii. 9. ? For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet, for your sakes, he became poor, that ye, through his poverty, might be rich. Did you view your sinfulness and guilt in such a light, that you could confidently trust the salvation of your immortal souls in the hands of a dependent being? Did you view the blood of such an one sufficient to atone for sins so great, so heinously aggravating, as those committed by you in a Gospel land?—sufficient to procure for you pardon, justification, and eternal life? Those of you who have lately made a profession of Christ, lately had your attention occupied about your soul concerns, been seriously anxious respecting your future destiny, and have obtained relief, and hope you are converted, what answer can you give to these questions? It is probable you may have a more distinct view of the subject than some others, who were converted years ago.

I would therefore suggest to you, a recollection of your particular exercises, at the time when, you hope, you were enabled to close with Christ, in the first instance; and thence determine, whether you did embrace Christ as he is exhibited in the Scriptures, i. e. as an independent, self-existent, eternal, almighty, and infinitely

gracious being, one possessed of those adorable perfections essentially, inherently, in his own true original nature ; or only by derivation, delegation, or office. Allow this inquiry to be made, my friends, because to me it appears, that, on the distinguishing character of the Savior you embrace, must depend the distinguishing nature of your faith and conversion. When a certain person of whom we have account in John ix. 36. was interrogated by Christ, whether he believed on the Son of God, he replied, Who is he, Lord, that I should believe on him ? And after Christ was declared to him, he said, Lord, I believe : and worshipped him. The apostle, in Romans x. 14. asks, How shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard ? By hearing of Christ, it cannot be rationally supposed, that Paul here intends a merely being informed, that the Savior proposed, as the object of faith and love, is Jesus Christ, by name, or that he is the Son of God, in so many words, without any further explanation ; but that the nature and character of the Savior be clearly exhibited to view ; before it can be expected, that he be received. Suppose one of you to be sick of a dangerous disease, and to seek relief ; and further, that a certain physician be recommended to you, by his name, but of whom you have no personal knowledge, would you apply to him, nay, could you *possibly* confide in him, till you had learnt his distinguishing medical character, or, after you had, on inquiry, found it in any material respect deficient ? But should you do it, would not observers, with propriety, conclude you did not view your disorder of the most dangerous kind ? So with respect to

the subject under consideration : suppose a fin-
 sick soul to embrace a Savior, of whose nature and
 character he is ignorant, or who is not exhibited
 as possessing the greatest possible excellency, such
 as infinity and eternity of nature, original fulness
 of power, wisdom and grace, would not friends
 be led to fear, respecting your views of sin, your
 own guilt, and need of an infinite Savior?
 Would they not be led to doubt, whether you
 had seen sin to be *exceeding* sinful ; and viewed
 your criminality *infinite* ; when they find you
 relying, for pardon, justification, and eternal life,
 on a finite atonement ; as that atonement must
 assuredly be, which is made by a derived, de-
 pendent being ? If Jesus Christ is indeed, and
 in truth, a self-sufficient, independent, eternal
 and infinitely perfect being, and you believe in,
 trust and worship a finite, derived, dependent
 one, your Savior (pardon me if I lack candor)
 must be an ideal or imaginary one, your faith
 vain, your confidence presumptuous, and your
 worship idolatrous. Are you not then chargeable
 both with idolatry and disobedience to divine com-
 mands ? For we are, in Scripture, strictly pro-
 hibited the worship of any intelligent being, sep-
 arate or distinct from Jehovah ; and God the
 Father has not only commanded the angels to
 worship Christ, but also, "that all men should
 honor the Son even as they honor the Father."

But not to enlarge here, let us attend a little
 to the second proposition, viz. That because Christ
 lives, all true believers in him shall live also.
 Herein is comprized a gracious promise ; and it
 also implies an intimate, yea, an indissoluble
 connexion between Christ's life and that of the

believer. Not, we apprehend, a natural or necessary connexion, but a constituted one. The connexion between Christ and the believer, is, in Scripture, represented by the union of the branch with the vine; see John xv. 5. and likewise by the union of the cion with a foreign stock, by ingrafting. This kind of union or connexion is considered, not as natural or necessary, according to the established laws of nature, but a constituted one. So, in the gospel economy, there is a constituted connexion between Christ and the believer, and the bond of union is faith. In the sovereign, gracious scheme of redemption, God is pleased to ordain, that Christ should die, to atone for sin; that sinners, who resemble the Israelites, bitten by the fiery flying serpents, should behold him, as it were, lifted up on the cross; and, in consequence of a view of him, should be healed of their malady and finally saved. Or in other words, Jesus Christ, having, pursuant to the covenant between his Father and him, made atonement for sin, and being exhibited as the object of faith, for guilty sinners, and possessing all fulness, it is, in a sovereign and gracious way, rendered consistent for the Holy Spirit to communicate to the sinner that assistance by which he is enabled to apprehend Christ, as an all-sufficient Savior; and afterwards, from time to time, afford him that aid, by which he can renewedly act faith on Christ, and by divine constitution partake of all the benefits of his redemption. And this participation of the benefits of Christ's atonement is conceived to be what constitutes the believer's life. And when Christ promises, that they shall live, he intends by it, that they shall first be

quickened by the Holy Spirit, to spiritual life, though naturally dead in trespasses and sins, that they shall have, while in this world, a series of believing exercises, or acts of faith in Christ, in consequence whereof, all needed light, joy, holiness, and grace, shall flow into their souls, from him in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead; that they shall receive from God the Father pardon of sin, complete justification in his sight, adoption into his family, and a right to all the privileges of his children. These, and innumerable other blessings, are ensured to the believer, in this life; and at death, his holiness and happiness shall be perfected, by a continued, uninterrupted and increased communication of Divine influence to eternity, which will constitute the believer's life in heaven. O! astonishing scheme that of man's redemption! Gracious plan! What a sure foundation is laid in Zion, on which the penitent sinner may rest his hope of eternal happiness and glory, without a possibility of disappointment: that is, Jesus Christ, the chief corner-stone, elect and precious. Because he lives, independently and eternally, the believer in him shall live also. I mean not in the same sense, in the same mode, but spiritually. Because he is possessed of infinite fulness, and that essentially in his own nature, originally and inherently, and not by derivation: therefore, all the saint's wants shall be fully supplied, even to an overflowing degree. As our Savior speaks, John vii. 38. He that believeth in me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. How much surer this foundation than that of a derived, dependent, finite Savior!

Improvement.

What has been suggested is calculated to inspire admiration and gratitude. In a view of the grace manifested in providing such an infinite and all-sufficient Savior for guilty sinners, let the language of every heart be, Glory to God in the highest strains; glory to God the Father, for laying help for us on one that was mighty and able to save to the uttermost. Glory to God the Son, who manifested his compassion for us, when he said to his Father, in reference to the arduous work of our redemption, *Lo, I come, to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart.* As if he had replied, "That gracious purpose of thine, O Father, which thou intimatest, respecting sinful man, is perfectly correspondent with the inclination of my heart, and I am ready and cheerful to accede to the proposal." Glory to God the Spirit, whose gracious concurrence in the wonderful plan so evidently appears, from what he has done and is still doing (particularly in our land and in this place) in the application of the atonement Christ made for us.

Let Christians take encouragement from the gracious promise of the Savior in the text, "*Because I live, ye shall live also.*" It was spoken to his disciples immediately, but extends to all who ever did or shall truly believe on his name; and infallibly secures to every believer, not only the implantation of a principle of spiritual life in regeneration, but also a succession of holy exercises through life and to eternity. Take courage, all you who believe in the independent and eternal

Savior ; though your faith may be at times weak, and you may, consequently, and in a view of your spiritual leanness, be harrassed with fears and doubts, and may be just ready to conclude against the reality of your conversion ; yet look to Jesus, the Finisher, as well as the Author, of faith. Think on his gracious promise in the text, and believe his word, that you shall live. And let it be your constant inquiry, what you shall render unto him for his love to sinners ; not as an equivalent therefor, but as the expression of holy gratitude. If you wish to manifest your gratitude, exert yourselves in his service ; study to promote his cause, by laboring to bring others to the knowledge of him. Let your light shine for their conviction ; recommend his religion by a suitable deportment. In this way you may honor God, increase your comfort, and, if it please him to smile on your exertions, you will be instrumental of much good to others.

And let sinners be entreated to come and build their hopes of future happiness on the sure foundation laid for them in Zion, viz. the independent, self-existent, and almighty Savior of the Scriptures, the essentially, originally, and inherently wise, powerful, and good Emmanuel ; and then they will not fallaciously disappoint you in the day of trial ; as your hope, if placed on any other basis, assuredly will : for, in the Lord, Jesus Christ, or the Lord Jehovah, or Jehovah our Righteousness, alone, is righteousness to justify, and power to save.



The following Hymns were sung on the day in which the foregoing Discourse was delivered :
 2d Hymn in the first Book, 148th Hymn second Book, and 16th Hymn first Book.

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